Montana State Rehabilitation Council Meeting Minutes November 12, 2015

Montana State Rehabilitation Council November 12, 2015 Disability Rights Montana Conference Room

Members present: Rick Heitz, Anna Gibbs, John Senn, Linda Zermeno, Tom Osborn, Jim Marks, Michelle Pickell, Amy Capalupo, Coreen Faulkner, Donna Marie Robnett, Tiffany Costa, Mike Woods, Frank Podobnik

Members absent: Robin Haux

Staff and visitors present: Peggy Williams, Chanda Hermanson-Dudley, Ellen Condon, Beverly Berg Mark Mahnke, Shawn Tulloch, Mike Hermanson

Rick Heitz opened the meeting and the minutes from September were approved. There was no public comment.

National Conferences Report

Michelle Pickell attended the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC), Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR), and National Council of State Agencies of the Blind (NCSAB) in Seattle, and reported on them. She stated that the main job of the SRC is to review, analyze, and advise. It is important that the client voice is heard. They talked about strategic planning and "SMART" goals. Many SRC's have committees such as Business Relations, Quality Assurance, WIOA Implementation, and Membership. Many states have a business relations person on staff. We need to rethink rehabilitation strategies and increase employer relationships. All states are struggling with being able to spend their Pre-Employment Transitions (Pre-ETS) funding set aside.

State and Federal Update

Jim Marks stated that the state plan draft is due on December 10 even though the final regulations are not yet out.

Because there is not enough money in the budget, VRBS is implementing the Order of Selection (OOS). By federal mandate, VRBS must serve people with the most significant disabilities first, and VRBS assigns a "disability level order' to each client. As of October 19, VRBS is not serving <u>new</u> clients in category 3, the least significant disability category. These clients are being put on a waiting list and also referred to other agencies which might serve them. The funding issue stems from the federal Pre-ETS set-aside requirement that VRBS must spend 15% of the budget on high school students with disabilities. This leaves only 85% of the budget for the other clients we need to serve.

VRBS is working on reorganizing staff. Former Regional Administrators will lead statewide teams in areas such as youth services and employer relations.

Jim also discussed the case management system, MACS, which is still causing problems and affecting employee morale.

Technical Assistance Contract with Rural Institute

Ellen Condon from the Rural Institute at the University of Montana talked about the technical assistance contract between VRBS and the Rural Institute. They are bringing in staff from across the state and Seattle and British Colombia. At the VRBS' counselor request, they will make contact with schools and they can provide different levels of service: (1) webinars and conferences for everyone, and (2) targeted intensive assistance as needed. They are also available on an as-needed basis to consult with staff.

State Plan

Mike Hermanson talked about the state plan and how things are changing. We are now submitting a combined state plan with Department of Labor and Office of Public Instruction. VRBS is conducting town hall meetings across the state. These will be in a different format than previous years. Now the meeting will be more of a dialog. The meetings will be held in four cities: Helena, Great Falls, Missoula and Billings.

Mike also discussed the Governor's Report. The Council recommending including the terms "review, analyze and advise" that Michelle had mentioned earlier.

The consumer satisfaction survey is on hold because we can't get information from the case management system (MACS) yet. We may change this to a July through June program year instead of using the calendar year.

Field Services Update

Chanda Hermanson-Dudley asked that people spell out W-I-O-A rather than pronouncing it as one word, because the word is offensive to Native Americans. Also, VRBS is calling the Pre-Employment Transitions Services, Pre-ETS, rather than PETS.

Chanda talked about Section 511 of WIOA, which addresses subminimum wages and employers or facilities that have exemptions from paying minimum wages for people with disabilities who do not meet minimum job performance standards.

Working with the Department of Labor on the state plan, Sally and Barb are on the employer committee; Tammy is on the youth committee; Chanda is on the barriers committee; and Peggy and Mike are working on the data performance committee.

VRBS will be moving a counselor position from Billings to Havre because of the caseload growth in Havre and Glasgow.

Chanda also mentioned that VRBS may need to close Category 2 under Order of Selection.

Blind and Low Vision Update

Beverly Berg mentioned that the Older Blind program had overspent its budget in 2015 and had to stop services to people who are driving and only giving out items that are in stock.

Under the Business Enterprise Program (vending machines), one vendor is doing well, but the other two vendors' income is going down. There is an emphasis on healthy vending and vendors will put labels on machines with the nutritional information. One state is putting blind vendors in prisons.

Transitions Update

Mark Mahnke talked about VRBS contracting with schools (we can use the Pre-ETS money and serve students with group activities rather than individual case services). So far 15 schools have signed contracts. Mark is making presentations to Special Education, Superintendents, Transitions Conference, CEC, Special Education Co-ops. Mark helped with the Disability Awareness conference in Billings which was focused on employer engagement.

Deaf Services Update

Shawn Tulloch talked about people who are hard of hearing. It generally takes about 7 years for a person to accept a hearing loss. Three things that affect their hearing are: (1) distance between two people (come closer); (2) background noise affects people; (3) echos off the wall affect people.

Next Meeting Date March 3-4 in Helena